

VZCZCXRO0285
RR RUEHROV
DE RUEHMO #2851 3421349
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 081349Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5749
INFO RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0018

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 012851

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/RUS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/07/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM PINR RS

SUBJECT: METROPOLITAN KIRILL SEES POPE BENEDICT AS MORE PRAGMATIC THAN JOHN PAUL, BUT NO PLANS FOR VISIT

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: 1.4 (d).

During a recent lunch, Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kirill offered the Ambassador his views on a series of issues. Among them:

-- return of bells from Harvard to the St. Daniel's Monastery: Kirill was pleased with the progress to date. (We understand that businessman Arkadiy Vekselberg, who is financing the return and the casting of replacement bells for Harvard, has reached agreement on the cost of the transaction. Vekselberg's people are currently negotiating the necessary permits.) Kirill agreed that the return was a very positive moment in U.S.-Church relations and endorsed Ambassador's suggestion that it be commemorated by an appropriate event. In a subsequent conversation, Moscow Patriarchate Deputy Chairman for External Church Relations Vsevolod Chaplin agreed to develop suggestions for an event;

-- relations with the Roman Catholic Church: Kirill was upbeat about Pope Benedict, whom he termed "more pragmatic" than John Paul II. There are no plans for a papal visit, Kirill said, and any such event would have to be very well prepared;

-- pending Moscow City Duma legislation that would, among other things, prohibit religious agitation: Kirill said the Russian Orthodox Church is not interested in prohibiting agitation, and offered that there was no need to be concerned about the presence of the Mormon Church in Russia;

-- Kirill described xenophobia in Russia as a "problem," although he thought the media were exaggerating its severity and local officials do not manage it well. In Kirill's view xenophobia and racism were more severe problems "ten years ago" but, Kirill added, he did not want to minimize the magnitude of the current problems;

-- Kirill endorsed the Ambassador's proposal that the ROC and the Embassy establish a better channel for communication about issues of mutual concern, including religious freedom. Embassy subsequently discussed further the Ambassador's proposal with Vsevolod Chaplin, who had been informed of Kirill's endorsement and said he was willing to be a point of contact in establishing the channel.

BURNS